

## Mice eating rare seabirds alive

### Level 2 • Intermediate

#### 1 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

predator	extinct	endangered	remote	ornithologist
horrified	carnivore	rare	chick	catastrophe

1. If a creature is \_\_\_\_\_, it no longer exists anywhere in the world.
2. An \_\_\_\_\_ is someone who studies birds.
3. A \_\_\_\_\_ is an animal that kills and eats other animals.
4. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a baby bird.
5. If something is \_\_\_\_\_, it is not often seen or found.
6. If you are \_\_\_\_\_, you find something extremely shocking and unpleasant.
7. A \_\_\_\_\_ is something that causes a lot of damage and suffering.
8. An \_\_\_\_\_ species is one that may soon become extinct.
9. A \_\_\_\_\_ place is one that is very far from cities, towns or people.
10. A \_\_\_\_\_ is an animal that eats meat.

#### 2 Find the information

Look in the text and find the following information as quickly as possible.

1. Where is Gough Island?
2. Which country governs Gough Island?
3. How many mice live on the island?
4. How much do albatross chicks weigh?
5. How much do the mice weigh?
6. How much will it cost to remove all the mice from the island?

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#### From stowaway to supersize predator: the mice eating rare seabirds alive

John Vidal, environment editor  
May 20, 2008

- 1 For tens of thousands of years, the birds of Gough Island lived without danger on their rocky island in the south Atlantic. Today, the remote British-owned island, which has been described as the home of the most important seabird colony in the world, still has 22 species of birds and is a world heritage site. But now Gough Island has become the stage for one of nature's great horror shows. When the first whaling ships landed there 150 years ago, mice escaped from the ships and their numbers have now grown to 700,000 or more on an island of about 25 square miles.
- 2 Ornithologists are horrified that the British house mouse has somehow changed and now grows to up to three times the size of ordinary domestic house mice. Instead of surviving on a diet of insects and seeds, it has adapted itself and has become a carnivore, eating baby birds alive in their nests. They are now believed to be the largest mice in the world. Birdlife International, a global alliance of conservation groups, has recognized that the mice, which have no predators themselves, are out of control and could make several of the world's rarest bird species extinct.
- 3 Birdlife International, which runs the Red List of endangered bird species, has now put two of Gough Island's bird species on the list of the world's most critically endangered species, the highest level of danger. Five other bird species on the island are also said to be in danger of becoming extinct.
- 4 The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) has proposed hiring helicopters to drop thousands of tonnes of rat poison on the volcanic island, 2,000 miles off the coast of South America. "A government-funded study done with New Zealand, which has removed rats completely from many islands, shows it is possible. The mice would eat the poison and just go to their nests and die. We think it could be done fairly easily and would cost about £2.6m," a spokeswoman said.
- 5 "Things are getting worse on Gough," said Dr Geoff Hilton, an RSPB scientist who has been researching conservation problems in UK overseas territories. "The presence of house mice means that rare birds have no chance of survival. The only hope for these birds is to remove the mice completely. The mice are eating this island alive. Without help Gough Island will probably lose the majority of its seabirds," said Hilton.
- 6 People who have seen the mice in action say they attack at night either alone or in groups, eating through the nests to attack the baby birds. The birds' parents are unable to defend them. Studies suggest about 60% of all the baby birds on Gough Island die in their nests. "It is a catastrophe. The albatross chicks weigh ten kilograms. They developed on Gough Island because it had no mammal predators – that is why they are so easy to attack. The mice weigh 35 grams; it is like a pet cat attacking a hippopotamus," said Hilton.
- 7 Britain has been criticized for not doing enough to support the ecology of its overseas territories, which mainly consist of groups of islands such as Pitcairn, Tristan da Cunha and the Falklands. 32 of the world's 190 most endangered birds are now officially British responsibility.
- 8 The RSPB's spokeswoman added: "The study shows there is some hope. The UK government has supported us in discovering the problem, in conducting the study, and now in finalizing our plan to get rid of the mice. The big question is whether the UK will take its international commitments seriously and do what the governments of New Zealand and Australia have done, and provide the big money needed to actually get rid of the mice. If they don't, we won't be able to help these endangered bird species."
- 9 The discovery that the mice had changed their diets and grown in size was made by Richard

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Cuthbert, a professional ornithologist who spent a year on the island in 2001. "It sounds incredible that a mouse could attack a baby bird, but these birds are really big round balls of fat covered in feathers, and because they are so fat and big they cannot defend themselves," he said.

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### 3 Comprehension check

Are these statements *True (T)* or *False (F)* according to the text?

1. It will be very difficult to remove all the mice from Gough Island.
2. The albatross chicks are almost 30 times bigger than the mice.
3. New Zealand has tried to remove rats from some islands but without success.
4. The mice first arrived on Gough Island in the 19th century.
5. Gough Island is near the coast of South America.
6. No-one spends more than a few days on Gough Island because it is so remote.

### 4 Find the word

Look in the text and find the following words and expressions. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. A three-word expression meaning *a special place protected by UNESCO*. (para 1)
2. A noun meaning *the activity of hunting for whales*. (para 1)
3. A verb meaning *to change your behaviour to deal with a new situation*. (para 2)
4. A three-word expression meaning *a research project paid for by the government*. (para 4)
5. An adverb meaning *to some degree but not completely*. (para 4)
6. A three word expression meaning *to remove completely*. (para 8)
7. A noun meaning *a promise to do something*. (para 8)
8. A verb meaning *to make the final arrangements for something*. (para 8)

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#### 5 Word building

Complete the table using words from the text.

	verb	noun
1	conserve	
2		proposal
3	survive	
4	discover	
5	commit	
6		escape
7		recognition
8		removal

#### 6 Prepositions

Complete these phrases from the text using prepositions.

1. out \_\_\_\_\_ control
2. up \_\_\_\_\_ three times the size
3. survive \_\_\_\_\_ a diet of insects and seeds
4. in danger \_\_\_\_\_ becoming extinct
5. no chance \_\_\_\_\_ survival
6. consist \_\_\_\_\_
7. get rid \_\_\_\_\_
8. covered \_\_\_\_\_ feathers

#### 7 Discussion

Should governments spend money to protect endangered species?

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### KEY

#### 1 Key words

1. extinct
2. ornithologist
3. predator
4. chick
5. rare
6. horrified
7. catastrophe
8. endangered
9. remote
10. carnivore

#### 2 Find the information

1. in the South Atlantic
2. the UK
3. 700,000
4. ten kilograms
5. 35 grams
6. £2.6 million

#### 3 Comprehension check

1. F
2. T
3. F
4. T
5. F
6. F

#### 4 Find the word

1. world heritage site
2. whaling
3. adapt
4. government-funded study
5. fairly
6. get rid of
7. commitment
8. finalize

#### 5 Word building

1. conservation
2. propose
3. survival
4. discovery
5. commitment
6. escape
7. recognize
8. remove

#### 6 Prepositions

1. of
2. to
3. on
4. of
5. of
6. of
7. of
8. in